



WRITERS

2016

WRITERS

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Letter from the Editors

Readers,

In the 2016 edition of *Writers*, many of our contributors find themselves perched in a precarious in-between: between innocence and disillusionment, between love and violence, between intimacy and isolation, between the cosmic and the ordinary. With crisp honesty and careful diligence, our contributors make a gorgeous mess of polarity.

The stories and moments you'll find between these pages are not about loss, love, or being; they are about losing, loving, and becoming. "A becoming which never becomes," champions the author of our epigraph, Maggie Nelson. Perhaps that's why our Editor's Choice image is only a quick, moving snapshot of an ordinary jazz parade, that if only for that moment discloses the cosmic ("Impromptu Jazz Parade," 4). Our Editor's Choice poem is about loving – about the simultaneous feeling of infinity and destruction the speaker experiences when she lies in bed with her love ("In Bed," 3). We feel deep down how funny and sad it is to lose innocence when the speaker of "Family Gumbo" exclaims, "What fresh hell is this?" upon learning the secret of the sacred, memory-laden family recipe (5). Our contributors commingle the mental and physical planes of in-betweenness – an empty apartment in Singapore has the power to transform the speaker: "I even got to looking like a completely different person (almost transparent, shot through with happiness) yet it was like I'd never existed in any other way" ("Singapore Apartment," 57), and an entire culture exists between the cracks on the pavement in our Editor's Choice prose piece ("Checking Boxes," 1).

Between these pages are intimate moments of our contributors' experience with their own "becoming." They found themselves between two places, and paused to consider the possibilities that lie therein. And by sharing them, they create possibilities for us to embrace the spaces we inhabit in the world. In this magazine, we find ourselves together in the in-between.

Happy reading,

Ana Fonseca & Morgan Mann
Senior Editors

"A becoming in which one never becomes, a becoming whose rule is neither evolution nor asymptote but a certain turning, a certain turning inward, *turning into my own / turning on in / to my own self / at last*"

– Maggie Nelson

The Argonauts

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Impromptu Jazz Parade

BY EMILY FITZGERALD



Family Gumbo

BY SARAH BROUSSARD WEAVER

Marrying a Cajun usually means good food for the rest of your days. Unfortunately for my husband, I didn't know how to cook at all. Kraft mac and cheese and sandwiches were the best I could do. I slowly changed these sad dinners into better options, learning to follow recipes on the sides of cans and boxes before graduating to cookbooks. Cookbooks don't have the right recipe for gumbo, though. The gumbo you need is imbued with family history and memories; it's served in a bowl you have used for cereal since you were four, and you look around your childhood kitchen while eating it. The dining room music is your mom's voice. You don't have faith that you can replicate this in your own home, and neither do I.

After twelve years of living in Texas, I was tired of only eating authentic gumbo twice a year. The next time we went to Louisiana, I vowed to watch my mom make gumbo while writing down every step. I especially needed to learn the secrets of the burnt flour and butter that transforms to a magical substance called roux. I'd called my mom, asking for her recipe, but she couldn't give it to me. It ran through her blood. There were no precise measurements; the order of operations and ingredients varied in a confusing way. I decided the only way to learn was to get out my notebook and prepare to record history. It would begin with the roux, the dark brown substance that is the mother of gumbo.

My mom pulled out her ingredients as I busily wrote, excited to receive these generational secrets. My dad began boiling potatoes and eggs for potato salad, then set up and filled the rice cooker. Mom tore open a plastic bag of sand colored powder as I leaned closer to read the label – *Gumbo Base*. What fresh hell was this? With a righteous anger, I demanded to know why she was making fake gumbo, when I was here to learn the secrets of real gumbo. Mom was taken aback. She said, "I've been using this instead of roux for years now. Everyone uses it, even Maw Maw Bruce."

This made it all so much worse. My 95-year-old grandmother, whose first language was Cajun French, raised swimming in the bayou, using an outhouse

and wearing flour sack dresses, had resorted to using some kind of predatory mix for people who don't know how to make gumbo. Life was unraveling, nothing was sacred, all those trite words applied.

I opened my eyes – they'd clenched shut with the horror of Mom's revelation. I controlled my voice as I slowly asked if she could show me the authentic way, instead. "Awww, it takes too long. This tastes just as good. It's a shortcut," Mom said.

If I had wanted a shortcut I would have used a Zatarain's box mix. But there was no changing Mom's mind – she reminded me that I had eaten and loved her gumbos over the past few years. They were all made with this *Gumbo Base*. So was the gumbo I'd devoured at Maw Maw's house three days ago. I crumpled up the sheet of paper with the beginnings of my recipe. The Secrets of the Roux were not to be mine that day.

Later that morning, gumbo simmered in a silver iron pot, releasing a magical scent. This was still a vital part of the smell of my childhood – gumbo, old books and Sweet Honesty perfume. It felt a little cheaper now. At the visit's end, I brought home two bags of *Gumbo Base* and eyed them askance for six months. Next time my mom visited, I offered the bags to her – to make us a gumbo.

Things change, I know. After all, my grandmother has a bathroom now and doesn't wear flour sack dresses anymore. I guess I can fight the changes, or I can use my mouth to eat gumbo instead. But I'm not happy about my family turning to this newfangled savior, Gumbo Base. No, I'm already wondering if I can use an Emeril cookbook to learn the Elusive Secrets of the Damn Roux.

Claire

BY SHANNON DANFORTH

"I don't look like a tomboy in this, you know," she related to me in an unnecessarily loud voice. "It's because I wear this to *gymnastics*. But usually I am."

She sat across the table from me, slurping her root beer float, wearing a pastel pink leotard of some shiny vinyl material, with a yellow tee over it that was covered in light brown stains. Her hair was a tangled mess. I could see root beer, the part that hadn't ended up in her mouth, making her face and fingers sticky. I got up and washed my hands.

"My aunt, you know, she lived during the *segregation*. Well I don't mean segregation, actually. I just mean that way back in 1919 they didn't let girls do all the stuff boys get to do."

I nodded and said that sounded like a type of segregation to me. She was pouring more root beer into her glass. The soda fizzed and cascaded down the side. She tried to sip all the bubbles up.

"Well, my aunt *loved* football. And then she... so she cut off her hair and dressed as a *boy* and joined the team." She tried to spoon vanilla ice cream into her mouth, but her hair got in the way. She glared at the long auburn strand and brushed it to the side with a sticky hand. "She was so good they put her as *quarterback*."

I put on my most surprised face as I ran a wet paper towel over the table, which was more vanilla ice cream than wood surface.

"And she was the *queen* of all of them. Only nobody knew, not yet. Until one day, one day her *wig* came off and they realized that girls could be good at football too. And that's why they made the new laws. What if you drank root beer every minute of every day?"

I told her it would be very dehydrating.

"Speak in *English*, please."

Root beer has a lot of sugar and sodium, I said.

She nodded. "You should never, ever, *ever* drink *real* beer before a meeting. You'll just get sleepy."

I resolved to take this advice to heart.

She devoured the rest of the float, managed to get more root beer foam in her hair, and unwillingly trudged up the stairs after I ordered her to the shower.

"I'm going to play hide-and-seek when I get out."

No, I said, first we have to put in that detangling spray your mother was telling me about.

"That's why I'm gonna hide. It smells *awful*."

Body & Flesh

By COITO



Squished Bananas

BY KATE FENNIMORE

The kings of the dead sat perched upon their throne of wood, surveying. The vultures' whole demeanor was irritated: angry at the crowd of gawkers with their melting Fudgesicles, angry at the mess of branches surrounding them – the branches, fastened to one another to form a makeshift, imitation tree, were erect and angular, so unlike the fluid shapes that make up nature. The black river of the vultures' bodies was interrupted only by small splotches of white and a head that was fleshy and pink. They looked like old Italian men, weathered with time and obscured by wrinkles.

I hoped my mom had packed me a pudding cup for lunch, but I wouldn't eat it if it was tapioca. Those little grains of rice are the worst, they remind me of maggots. The best kind of pudding is the double chocolate one, where one layer of pudding, dark as dirt, sits on top of another layer that looks a little sandier in color, and then another layer of dark brown. Even after sitting in my lunch box all day, it would somehow still have tasted cold, thick, and sweet.

There were four or so turtles bobbing in the swampy water of the turtle exhibit, their bodies looked gaunt and distorted; only their heads peeking out from the water. Another four were sprawled out in a line on a log spanning the width of their miniature bayou, sunning themselves underneath the heat lamp. Can they tell the difference between this artificial light and the real warmth of the sun? They sat like green rocks, motionless and slick with algae, until one turtle, larger than the rest, came along and began to walk on them. He didn't stop and say "excuse me," but continued on without hesitation over the first basking turtle. The turtle underfoot, after being berated and squished, dived for the water. The alpha continued on his way, his crawling enhanced with an air of arrogance, until all four of the former lounging turtles were annoyed and submerged themselves in the swampy water. The great turtle had the log all to himself. I could see the couple next to me taking photos of this grand turtle. He stoically poised his head for them, but all of the photos must have turned out blurry and out of focus because of the thick glass wall surrounding him. Did the whole world look blurry and out of focus

to the turtles?

How could lunch still be so far away? I felt myself getting impatient and irritable. My mom always says I get cranky when I am hungry. Maybe she's right. My stomach howled. I tried to shush it with a quick slap, but the people next to me had already heard. I should have put a granola bar in my pocket for a snack; one of those Nutrigrain bars would have really hit the spot.

The Sun Bear looked so content living his life in his enclosure. His house sat on top of a concrete hill and if he looked over the edge he would see a continuous slab of concrete running down to the ditch below. He had a bright yellow hammock that looked like a banana, squashed between his only two trees. There wasn't enough room for it to hang down like it should. And there was a pile of toys that could be found in a landfill: a tire, a big, wiffle-looking ball, and some plastic mesh. He was little for a bear, about as big as myself if I got down on all fours and crawled around. He was cloaked in a brown sweater that must have kept him warm in the winter and his nails, his greatest asset, were long, sharp, and looked like thick fingers protruding from his paws. The Sun Bear didn't move a whole lot. There wasn't much room to roam. He just stood in one spot and swiped his paws along the dirt. His claws looked like rubber, bendable; they didn't dig into the ground but just slid along the surface, sweeping the dead grass and clumps of dirt from side to side. He looked so exultant and ignorant, seemingly unaware of me or anyone else, unaware of his captivity, just a friend to the dirt.

If there was a sandwich waiting for me in my lunch box, I hoped it was anything but ham. A ham sandwich turns soggy quickly. If mayonnaise mingles with lettuce and tomatoes too long, they become squishy and wilted. The only way I will ever eat a ham sandwich is if the lettuce and mayonnaise have only just been taken out of the fridge.

I could tell we had entered the bat enclosure by the smell of rotting fruit, sickly sweet. My stomach turned and for the moment, I had forgotten about my troubling hunger. The cave was dark and I had to get right up next to the half-moon of glass keeping me from the bats in order to see those devilish creatures. The bats were suspended from thin branches that seemed to hang in midair, not attached to any tree. Or, they dangled in the recesses

of their shelter, huddled together, hooked into the metal mesh that made up the ceiling, with their claws. When they were fed, they became savage. They were a blur of wings, flitting in rapid laps while screeching noisily. One fought another for a cantaloupe rind suspended from a branch, poking and jabbing with his claws until the other bat gave up and tumbled from the branch into flight. The loser moved on to start another boxing match over a ripe banana overflowing from its peel.

Cantaloupe made my throat itch. It doesn't taste anything like its sweet cousins, the watermelon and honeydew. It tastes like carrots. I don't like it. Lucky for me, my mom knew I didn't like cantaloupe so she would never have packed me some for lunch. I hoped I didn't get any fruit at all.

The monkey looked as gloomy as a rainy day. I can't remember what breed he was, not an orangutan or baboon, but something more delicate. He was clouded with black and white fur – his mass of fur hung down in sheets, covering him from head to toe – and had a tail that drooped at the end like his almond eyes. He sat unmoved at the corner of two perpendicular branches of one of the wiry trees in his cage, one hand rested on a tin bucket, probably used to hold his food, and the other on a nearby branch that rose and sloped away from him. He looked like a statue. He faced the glass separating his enclosure from the rest of the world; the only thing that gave his stony presence away was his eyes. They read my face like a book, moving from left to right and then flipping some imaginary page until he bore down into me. I felt as if we had switched places and I was the one trapped behind a wall of gawking faces.

I would leave the zoo after lunch, but this was the moment I had been waiting for all day. My second grade class took a seat on the carpet of fresh, springy lawn stretched out in front of the elephant enclosure. I plopped down with gusto and felt my mouth begin to water as I unfurled the crumbled flap of my brown bag lunch. The boy next to me was also opening his lunch. We shared a hopeful look. My lunch was brimming with treats: a chocolate pudding, a PB and J sandwich, and Cheetos. What more could I ask for? I was so consumed with the tasty promise in front of me that I forgot all about my friend sitting next to me; I glanced over to see what goodness awaited him and was met with an unsatisfied expression: his lips were parted

in a frown that seemed to consume his face and his nose was scrunched as if he had smelled something sour. He didn't meet my gaze. Rather, he was engaged in a staring contest with a banana and what appeared to be a turkey sandwich that looked up at him from his tin lunchbox – neither of which had held up to the heat of the day. The boy snatched up the banana and dug his thumb into the end of it, prying it open and squishing half of it in the process. He began shoving the entire banana into his mouth, crushing it into his maw until it oozed out the sides. He chewed vindictively, as if he were punishing himself for having such a horrible lunch by eating that banana in as few bites as possible.

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Sonder

BY KRISTINE FOO

i wonder
if i
licked my lips
a crisp, a crisp
sensation –
a fickle
breath, wafts
past my cheeks
downcast.

i wonder
if, twined
to my lashes
the wispy, wisp
abrasion –
a little
twig, snapped
fast my eyes
downcast.

a little girl
a tiny, tiny
vision.

On Nature, Memory, and Mortality

BY CATHERINE WARNER

Given that both of my parents worked full-time jobs and my brother is eight years older than me, I spent a majority of my childhood with my grandmother. Her small home was stuffed with board games, card decks, play dough, and assorted movies such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *Edward Scissorhands*, and *Pocahontas*. She housed several animals including – but not limited to – a sheep dog named Nipper, three to four cats, a cockatiel, a peacock, and a few chickens.

My experiences at my grandmother's home revolved around a specific stool at her kitchen counter. It was a vantage point that provided me the perfect surface for crafts, the perfect distance to draw and watch a movie simultaneously, and the perfect height to watch my grandmother cook and tease her partner, Bill. I can recall the details of the worn stool I sat on, the faux-river bottom pattern of the kitchen floor, the wooden paneled walls, her record player, the scents of scratch cooking and purple playdough. But most distinctly, I remember the walks my grandmother and I would take in the morning to a small, wooded quarry just outside the perimeter of her house.

I can't say that I can differentiate between any of the remembered mornings we spent together; each one was a vigorous joy – a half-hour long escapade enrobed in the safety and comfort emanating from my grandmother. I remember the imprints my black boots left in snow, and the swirls of frost or dust Nipper left in his wake as he twirled and jumped around me. I remember looking up at my grandmother's dark green figure, perfectly coiffed hair illuminated from the sunrise behind her, and wondering at the twinkle in her eye, catching a whiff of Lipton tea with cream and sugar. I remember running through crackling, beige grass haphazardly picking sprigs of eucalyptus. I could smell the aromatic bouquets on my small hands for the remainder of the day. I donned a purple Scooby-Doo skort with beaded fringe one morning, wearing boots and tights to match. I remember feeling the beads lightly slap my legs as I ran down a hill, periodically blinded by yellow and orange rays flashing through branches. The inside of the quarry smelled of mulch and rain. During fall we followed streams of red leaves clustered on

the path, climbed up cascading rivers of yellow. Springtime brought fields of green, wafting scents of every kind of flower my grandmother grew in her garden – a small piece of land bursting over the lip with plants and earth. These ventures' ends I can never recall, but the memories of the journey haunt my senses.

In the coming years I hope to return to that quarry, to once again smell, see, hear the familiar sights of my childhood.

But with who?

* * *

"Did grandma give you a check to cash in your birthday card?"

No, she gave me cash.

"Okay, I only ask because she called today and asked if I had given it to you. You should call her."

I will.

"She'd really enjoy that."

I know, I'll find the time.

* * *

I didn't call her. Within the following weeks, I wanted to, I needed to, but I couldn't. I have no idea why I can't talk to the woman who raised me. Over Christmas my family and I spent the holiday with her. She sat in a kitchen chair gesticulating and nurturing conversation, ever the creator of life, the matriarch; she was as enigmatic as ever. But under the fluorescent light her hair had looked thin, so gray it was nearly purple. As the night wore on she seemed to fold into herself, almost deflating as she expended more and more energy. Her face became paler and paler, her blue eyes brightening and widening, projecting a visceral intensity. When I glanced at her it seemed like they were the only thing left, everything else was fading, see through, worn. The woman who stood so tall as to block out the sun faded under the light of a lamp.

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Vingt-Cinq Sous

BY SARAH BROUSSARD WEAVER

"Van san sou! Lots of glee guy!" My grandmother called out like a gypsy woman selling flowers on the street. She pulled toys and clothes from a plastic grocery sack and piled them up on my siblings and me. "You like this glee guy?" she asked me, shoving a McDonald's plastic toy in my face.

Emelda, my grandmother, loved garage sales. She frequented them as often as she could. The attraction came, I think, from being able to snatch items up, filling her arms for only a few coins. It was beautiful extravagance for a woman who'd grown up in such hard times. She'd quit school when she was eleven years old. Fifth grade was her twelfth. She went to work in a shrimp factory to help her family pay bills. There was no choice – there were nine children, not counting Emelda. This was the bayou of South Louisiana, so cotton-dressed women worked with seafood instead of the sewing machines they might have used elsewhere. Emelda shelled shrimp for hours with her leather-skinned fingers, was paid pennies by the pound, and never quite got the raw, fishy smell off before showing up for her next shift.

Maybe her mother cried because Emelda had to leave school. Maybe she didn't. Her parents were both illiterate. Did they see Emelda as already educated enough because she could read and write a little? It was already so much more than they would ever be able to do. I don't know much about her home life. I didn't think far enough ahead when she was still with us. I didn't know that one day I'd wish I knew more about her past.

It made her happy to see us happy. Sometimes we didn't like her secondhand gifts, but we still smiled dutifully and thanked her. We were overflowing with bubbly gratitude when a musty smelling t-shirt happened to still hold a vestige of style, or when the toy was a Barbie or an Etch-a-Sketch instead of a McDonald's toy. It was very hit or miss.

"Van san sou" was *vingt-cinq sous* – twenty-five cents. "Glee guy" was *dri-gaille* – trash. I didn't know this until I began college French, back in school in my thirties, Emelda in the ground for more than a decade. I received a

shock when we learned French numbers and I picked out the sounds in my memory to equal actual French words. We hadn't known what she was saying as she tossed things at us. She was marveling at how cheaply she had gotten these things – what a bargain – and also acknowledging the reason she got them cheaply: they were *drigaille* and had been discarded. But one woman's *drigaille* is another woman's *trésor* and Emelda flung her prizes with the joy of a Mardi Gras queen riding her float.

I vs. You

BY JACKIE OTT

I used to send my mom to the store to buy tampons.

You would wait till your dad was asleep and your brothers were out of the way and you'd tell your mom that you need them *right now*. This would usually end in a mad mother ("Why didn't you tell me sooner?") and you sitting in the locked car in the parking lot waiting for her to come back out because you refused to go inside with her, your red face illuminated by the street light and head filled with "Please don't let her run into that boy in the store with those in her hand."

I bought them myself once.

When you got to high school and could drive yourself you tried to buy them without your mom and you sat in the same parking lot with the same red face with "It'll be okay just go" and "you won't run into anyone" and "Jesus don't you call yourself a feminist" running through your head. You go in; you run into the boy from your grade school that you didn't want your mom to run into with a box of super+ in your hands.

(You tell your best friend and she lets you get embarrassed. She thinks it's because you liked him in grade school – you didn't. He just mocked you because you came back from summer in sixth grade too skinny for your previously childish-plump body, and you never wanted to run into him ever again but especially not with your vulnerability that just came back held in a slim box of cardboard between your shaking fingers.)

(The next time you need something, you tell your mom again, this time in the day with your brother sitting next to you because *I'm a woman* and *I'm proud* and *I need to say this damn it*. You pretend not to notice the look of disgust and the way he leaves the room. You shoot him a look of disgust and walk out on dinner when he makes a joke about your hormones making you angry. You just tried to make

a counterpoint to his arguments. Next time you write your mom a note and leave it on her nightstand. You know your dad won't make the bed and see.)

Then I hid them in the bottom of my cart.

When you get to college your mom can't make you home-cooked meals and hold you when you cry and do your laundry so you don't accidentally dye all your clothes red but she does know your anxiety and as a parting gift she buys you enough to last you at least a school year.

But eventually a year runs out and you can't borrow from your friends because you *know* how expensive that shit is (why aren't these subsidized by the government, it's not like I want to buy them) and you go take them like little cotton bullets to stuff in that gift (wound) from Mother Earth.

(You pretend you need that box of Miniwheats even though you have an unopened box in the dorm. You need something to cover the pastel-feminine-box up in the cart that you were only able to grab after you looked around and saw that no one is looking at you and can put them in the ca— okay cover them up now, someone's coming down the aisle, you can't let them see.)

The first time I hold it in my hand from the aisle to the check out I don't know (I do know) why I'm shaking.

The breath you took was huge and the box you bought was equally big (because if you're shedding the insecurities like the lining of your uterus you better get that big box) and it doesn't stop your eyes getting big and your steps hitting faster down this West Coast grocery store floor (it's different from the floor you saw in high school) when you notice that you know someone in the chips aisle (which is pretty disappointing because you wanted to buy a bag of chips). You'll get them next time you come to the store and you don't have this pastel-feminine-bomb in your hand.

I'm in my favorite tea shop, and my breath smells like cinnamon, and I ask my friend in a slightly lower volume than I normally would if she has a tampon.

She has a liner, and your other friend had what you wanted initially, and you make a flippant comment ("If only I turned in my essays as early as *this* always comes") and almost stuff it up your shirt before you remember that you're not hiding anymore. Even with the red face. Even with the banging of your feet and your heart and your blood, because you can't stop this any more then you can stop your breathing. And when a guy stops you on your way to the bathroom and asks you the Wi-Fi password you *don't*, you *won't*, you *refuse* to hide your hand (but that doesn't mean you don't sigh in relief when you reach the comfort of the woman on the push/pull door).

When I unclench my fists, my nails have dug blood-red half-moons in my palm.

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Desolate and Enlightened

BY OLIVIA VAN WEY



Bronze Medal

BY KURT BERNING

I cried in the living room because I was almost an adult now and my Dad couldn't tell me what to do anymore. It was a bleak scene: grey carpet under our feet, our splotchy grey couches, and my Dad's grey pinstriped overalls. I was 11, and every Saturday as my Mom worked her sixth day of the week delivering mail I'd be stuck at home with Dad. Dad who had seizures, Dad who couldn't work a real job anymore, Dad who still thought he was in charge of the family. I wanted to be the man our family depended upon, not him. That Saturday he insisted we visit Grandpa, which I didn't want to do, and that we drive the hated "back way." It always took longer, the gravel road was jarring, full of hidden potholes we never missed, and I knew he liked taking that road just to piss me off. I took a stand, I wasn't leaving. He yelled at me saying we were going and I started crying. We left a few minutes later.

For the next few years our battle raged mostly underground. I learned to avoid direct conflict as much as possible. He would look for opportunities to pick a fight or antagonize me, and I wouldn't react. When I wanted to go to the middle school fall dance, or quit playing baseball, I asked Mom instead of Dad. I took away his power by taking away his voice. Every few weeks a yelling or shoving match would explode from the stockpiled fuel of subversion and avoidance. Over time a cycle of peace and conflict was established. I was pretty sure I was winning.

"I'm sorry too, Mom, I didn't mean to say those things to you." I had been arguing with Mom again. After we fought I retreated into the game room to sulk and watch TV. I felt so sorry for hurting her. Half an hour passed, and Mom came in to talk. She apologized and I apologized and she told me she loved me. Every time I started a fight with her she would be the one to reconcile. I began to realize that our fighting was a civilian casualty of a pointless war. I had to change.

In the following months I altered my strategy for dealing with my father. I focused on making peace, on nurturing relationships with both parents, on choosing the family's wellbeing over my own desire for power. It worked pret-

ty well, and the fighting mostly stopped. I did it for Mom. She was the true leader of the family. She worked full-time, raised my older sister and me, took care of my disabled Dad, and made all the important decisions. Next was my older sister, who drove me around to sports practices and had a steady part-time job. My Dad and I thought we were fighting for control of the family. We were actually fighting for 3rd place.



Modern Day Anne Boleyn

BY HANNAH VOGEL

In the months leading up to her beheading,
Anne Boleyn was all emerald dresses and porcelain skin.

Her life having been dictated by men every day up to this point,
she felt the unforgiving edge of the blade long before the day she was sentenced to death

I would not be surprised if she pricked her finger and used the blood to bring
color to her cheeks and lips.

I would not be surprised if she was skipping meals and drinking too much
wine and trying to hold onto someone who decided there was no more use
for her.

We have mistakenly thought that our corsets and dresses, our lipstick and
pearls, would save us but men have always decided when the guillotine
drops

self-destruction to keep the interest of men

we are world-class thespians

All smiles and laughs, careful arm touches, and clever jokes
hoping to not meet the other end of a clenched fist at night

King Henry was said to have been able to wrap both hands around Anne
Boleyn's waist until his fingers overlapped

I wonder when she knew he dreamed of snapping her spine so she would
always lean towards him

Anne Boleyn was a daring and seductive woman but like so many before and
after her

we have fallen at the icy glare of a man who no longer finds us useful

There are times where your love feels like the edge of a knife.

Like Anne Boleyn, the contours of my skin no longer entice you,

i think our love dissipated somewhere between the angry fucking and quiet dinners

An Open Letter to that Traveler I Used to Know

BY KERRIE DORAN

Dear Austin, I think the textbook term would be "intimate partner violence," but the only name I could give to it right now would be "fuck you."

Dear Austin, I think my only regret would be sounding impressed when you told me about all the acid you took when you decided to hitchhike here from Dallas before spending your nights in Colonel Summers Park.

Dear Austin, yours is the only hand I've ever been afraid to have across my throat. You made comments about my body hair and jokes that weren't funny, but the night you laid next to me and said, "Uuuuh I just don't really get why feminism is necessary?" I choked. You talked over me while I tried to have a dialogue, and you made me feel small in a way I told myself a man couldn't. I've never slammed a door so hard in my life.

Dear Austin, in my own bed you raised a hand to me and with flushed cheeks I thought, "What would my mother say?" No, the woman who raised me with fire in her voice and hurricanes in her womb, two legs fashioned from watertight oak, and knuckles carved from marble didn't give me her middle name so that it could be silenced by some little fuck with a shitty stick n' poke across his left hand.

Dear Austin, I don't usually wish ill will on people, but when I replied, "I don't care" to my friend asking if you hitchhiked all the way to California alright, I meant it. If I heard you were lying in a ditch somewhere I wouldn't be surprised. I'd think, "Uuuuh maybe he just didn't really get why seatbelts were necessary?" The only good thing to come out of our relationship was the pair of headphones you left on my bedroom floor – I use them to listen to music I know you'd hate. God knows I burned all other remnants you left and I scrubbed you out of my skin.

Dear Austin, I hope you get a bad face tattoo. I hope another tweaker steals your shoes. I hope all of your Marlboros break, and your Hank Williams albums get scratched. I hope you forget my name in two years. I hope that

when the next girl who loves you, who whispers your name into the nape of your neck hoping to hear her own voice melt into your collarbone pleads with you to listen that you'll listen. I hope it doesn't take another slammed door for you to understand why feminism is necessary.

Dear Austin, if for every time you stick your thumb out on the highway, for every stranger's car you get into, you leave a woman crying in the dirt behind you, I hope you'll understand why you have one less home to come back to.

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(okay) this feeling explained (using other feelings and metaphors)

BY GABRIELA RIEGOS

The pitchest Black.

my favorite question I don't know the answer to.

Fear dipped in honey, left out to crystallize

A group of clouds over my head

- - a giant, beautiful set of cumulonimbus – that I cant seem to take my eyes off of.

Stubbing my toe... and the laughter that follows, or the sunburn that turns into a tan.

[For cliché purposes] the wind that dances beneath my wings as I dive down towards frigid open water.

The feeling of ripping out paper from a dated notebook to expose a fresh face.

[When one gets a pen to work after making many mad loops.]

A shirt that fits.

Willow trees,

flowing gently in the wind;

while I am walking

(past your)

weathered window,

watching (you)

wave.

We Whisper On

BY STEPHEN KELLAR

We whisper on
our lovely drunken evenings
listening to songs that felt
more romantic when we were stoned

You feed my simply famished mind
on your paperback quotations
I can feel your teeth in the dark
before the words
the sheets and layers fall
and our smiles break becoming
softer expressions

I notice you in the morning
the "this-is-too-easy" face you affect
the posture you neglect
the giveaway in your register
as you grin and tell me
it can only get worse from here

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Untitled

BY KERRIE DORAN

Our first date lasted 22 hours.
We drank grapefruit margaritas, but I got drunk off of your poetry
and the scent of your hair. I've never accepted an invitation
as fast as when you invited me into your bed that night,
and with your head between my legs,
I chuckled when I said I didn't know sex could feel so good.
You said – Who have you been having sex with?
I said – Men.
You said – Oh honey.
You scared the shit out of me.
It was the first time I believed someone when they told me
how good I tasted, and the next morning when you repeated the sentiment
in the shower, I thought for sure that you would drown.
You made it obvious that you had no fear of drowning in me.
I never learned how to stop giggling when
I held your hand, and I still can't get the sound
of your sighing vibrato
out of my head. Your voice sounded
like a chorus of angels when I was inside of you.
Your eyes, bigger than dinner plates, were exactly
what I wanted to drown in. Your lips were softer
than any pillow my head had ever touched.
I never learned how to say no to you,
and the night I called my dad
and cried into the phone,
choking on my inability to express
why I was afraid of your touch, I realized
I would never learn how to say no to you.
I was wrapped up in those 22 hours, in that warm tee shirt you lent me,
in the loss of no from my vocabulary, in the rope that you skillfully tied me in,
both of us learning how to trust those knots. I was wrapped up in you.
I'm sorry that I was too impatient to learn how to untangle.
I'm sorry my weapon of choice was a cell phone,

and I'm sorry I allotted myself
a 20 minute smoke break
to cut you out of my life.

I tossed you out
like a cigarette butt.

at once I knew I was not magnificent

By JOCELLE TADE



Para mi flor de amapola

BY KAREN M. BROWN

Mi amor nacido del mar,

Pétalos de amapola nacen de tu rostro,
te finges rey de las selvas
y gozas del calor del cervatillo
que apenas aprendió a caminar alrededor de las aguas negras.
Con tus espejos de zafiro
tomas sus manitas perdidas y con un beso en la frente,
tranquilizas los vientos de su mente.

Mi amor nacido del mar,

En un laberinto de amapola me he perdido
y me mientan la madre los dioses de las esferas que jamás necesito.
De ellos, de las tierras, de las verdades, de las rosas nos hemos despedido
porque la oveja como la ninfa por fin se han dormido.

Mi amor nacido del mar,

Debajo de las olas donde nació la humanidad:
¡Mis sueños hechos realidad mientras me ahogo en la oscuridad!
¡Respirando vanamente en la profundidad que quisiera encontrarme al despertar!

Mi amor nacido del mar,

Temo que algún día te encuentre en la red de alguien más.
Algún día la voz de otra escucharás
y con ella te veré bailar y jugar, y de mí no te acordarás.

Mi amor nacido del mar,

Lárgate de mi vista
antes de que el verano se duerma.
Tus regalos, ¡Basta!
Tus caricias, ¡Basta!
Tu presencia me enferma,
Quítate y déjame en paz.
Tu maldita huida por el aire
– jamás te creía capaz.

swollen

BY HANNAH VOGEL

your knuckles are still swollen from when you punched the shower wall
i'm not sure if i dodged it, or you missed,
but since then i have begun to wonder when my cheek will meet your fist and
i am going to have to start telling people that i "fell down the stairs"

my belly is swollen with cheap beer and some leftover gin and the water i
hope will sober me up

i have been crying and my eyes are swollen and i am reminded that my
sadness has never been beautiful
my trash can is swollen with my used tissues and popsicle sticks and i have
never resonated so closely with it.

my lips are swollen because we are fucking like we are desperate, or angry, or
like we think this might be the last time.
i'm always afraid it is going to be the last time and i press against you harder

i am swollen with questions i want to ask you but am too afraid to because
men have always scared me and all i have left is small talk which
i can tell you hate so i settle for silence instead and i try to pretend
like i'm comfortable with it and my lungs are swollen with these
unsaid words

i am swollen with the words "always" and "never" and how i should always
remember to never say them

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Stained

BY ALEX BLAIR ALLEN

A summer sun shines down on a hidden, bare warehouse in San Bernardino, California. From the outside there is no sign of life and to an extent, this is true. This dreary white warehouse a mile away from the County Fairgrounds does not house the wonders of life, but rather holds the secrets of death.

Inside, white walls are decaying into a grim grey and the once clean cement floor is now tarnished with traces of unfortunate visitors. On one side of the gloomy, isolated room, a broken analog clock forever shows the time as 6:30, morning or evening. Below the paralyzed clock, two metal tables seem to levitate inches away from a pair of stained sinks. Upon the right table lies death incarnate.

Here a frozen, deceased male in his late-twenties rests. His sticky, unclothed body latches on to the steel table and his muscles are incapacitated by rigor mortis, yet he looks as though he is in a light slumber. His upper appendages are tucked against his ice-cold torso and his teeth are parted leaving a potential snore unguarded. But this snore will never come.

The cause of his death is told in clues. On his exposed neck a series of bruises show that his death was not accidental, but rather a conscious decision. His hands – free of abrasions, but smeared now with ink – make me conclude that his death was without struggle. If he had struggled, if he had, for instance, tried to stop the rope from crushing his trachea, abrasions would be apparent on his fingers and hands. That is all his body tells us, beyond that, we are left to guess.

The embalming process begins. Small pink caps are gingerly placed under each eyelid in an attempt to mend his sunken in eyes. A thin waxy string is sown through the inside of both blue lips and then into his left nostril where it is tied. This suture keeps the mouth shut tight, his snores locked up.

A cornucopia of organs is moved from his now accessible thoracic and abdominopelvic cavity into a blaring red biohazard bag filled with dusty yellow

Permafix embalming fluid. The bag of intestines, lungs, kidney, spleen, brain matter, and miscellaneous organs is then sealed up and placed into the empty cavity. Lastly, scarlet orange Permaglo dye is pumped through his blood vessels in an attempt to restore a natural human hue to his pale body. The dye courses through his arteries when suddenly, his heavy right arm slumps off the table making water and blood splash to the ground – all but one drop missing my shoe.

The blood soaks into the shoelace of my right olive green boot. It's still there two years later, only the size of a dime. With every use of that rust-stained shoelace, I am reminded of all those who have left me behind, and of how little time, really, I have left.

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Portal to Portland

By GABRIELA RIEGOS



Transit

BY LEAH WALTERS

Car-Car-Car-Car-Car-Car-Car. Stop.

Westminster.

Mind The Gap. (Platform screen doors – glass and steel – safety providing sterility).

Turn Right: Way Out →

Upside down Ω cement tunnel with walls of paper.
Gypsy. Show of the Season. Final Weeks on Sale!

Open Space.

There is a rhythm;

escalators

to
the
left,

curve, guiding the eye to the right,

more escalators
there.

Simultaneously and centuries ahead into a space age design.
39 meters (128 feet) Underground

Grey cement. Grey steel pipes, escalators, walls, overhead beams – Silver shining everywhere else.

We have traveled time and space! Modernity here. Sterility/Cleanliness. The Stainless Steel Age.

It is a gentle design; curves are everywhere: the beams above travel from ground to ceiling in a ballet of smooth circles; round objects (lights and signs and metallic nuts and bolts) hold it all together.

Shoes are heard in satisfying thunk (echo), cla (echo), tck (echo) sounds. Movement mimics design: circular, up and left and circle and up and right.

Go up and right.

The escalator races the still stairs.

Walk	Stand
on	on
the	the
left	right.

Another curve left. Up and right.

Walk	Stand
on	on
the	the
left	right.

The circles, at intervals along the sides of the escalators and walls, add warmth. Posters at intervals add reminders.

"There is a world above"
"You are neither underground nor in the future, but in transit"

Another curve to the left.

B A R R I E R
[Oyster Card]

Introducing: the street chaos millions of people and tourist destinations an above city that is sprawling and constantly in motion where is this where

is that the locals are annoyed just need to make the commute tourists are buzzing they have found a new and exiting hive for a day or two or a week a history they have come to see that belongs to a people but for now *this* is theirs

History.
Parliament. The Abbey. The Elizabeth Tower. Whitehall.
Poster reminders.

It is all a gentle design.

38 meters (128 feet) below the earth, disemboweled and hollowed all for the sake of movement.

Foundation, centuries of earth, water, natural movement, shifting, that history (Parliament. The Abbey. The Elizabeth Tower. Whitehall.) was built on – carved out precariously, dangerously, gambling with years and years of *foundation*.

In transit within 38 meters (128 feet) of space, for now one can travel time and space within design and location and a vertical ascending or descending motion.

Westminster.

h i s t o r y



—

—

—

car-car-car-car-car-car-car-car.

Thanks for Stopping By

BY KERRIE DORAN

I.

In the house where I grew up too fast, there was this one rectangle of sunlight on the floor of my mother and father's bedroom where I used to lie. The glass of the window was old and spotted, and the frame was the darkest wood I had ever seen. Dust lingered in the air, and distant sun chimes would sing to me: sweetly, softly, blissful in their submission to the breeze responsible for their sound. That rectangle of sunlight always felt like Easter. I could lie there and play with the knobs on my mother's sewing kit, and I would never feel the need to move. The light would blanket me in the most comforting warmth, and the olive green carpet beneath my body felt sturdier than my own legs did – than they still do.

II.

Sometimes memories strike in unexpected ways. I anticipate the feeling of being punched in the stomach, but I'm so much more impacted by the ones that pass through me like a ghost. I can't seem to move until they're gone completely. I was walking down the street when I remembered. I doubled over on Willamette and Stanford. The sight of you in my bed overwhelmed me. I don't remember what month or what year it was, but you were looking up at me. I was so giddy that this weird kind of squeak escaped my throat – not that I would have dared attempt to suppress it. You laughed. Your hand was on the small of my back. "What can I do to get you to make that sound again?" you asked. It's my favorite memory of you. The warmth you provided me in that moment would have given the rectangle of light next to my mother's sewing kit a run for its money. I try not to think of it often. I wonder if you think of it ever.

III.

Before Thanksgiving, my dad and I moved two cords of firewood from the driveway to the backyard. We wore yellow leather gloves that smelled like hard work, and the cold air stung my face even though I was sweating. We stacked towers of wood all afternoon – until my back started to hurt. I didn't feel like my dad's daughter, but I felt like his kid. I think that's

what matters. I think it made all the difference. My legs have gotten sturdier since you left my bed – since you stopped asking what you could do to steal squeaks from the back of my throat. They had to. I trusted them to push wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow of firewood up a driveway that felt more like a mountain. It took hours, but when we finished, my pride overpowered my sore muscles. I closed my eyes and let the evening air cool down my flushed cheeks. I was enough to keep myself warm. I was enough.

Introvert

BY GABRIELA RIEGOS



Singapore Apartment

BY PEMA ROJAS-ECHENIQUE

The door opens onto the center of the main room, across from a wall of windows that opens onto a narrow balcony. Outside, the fibrous blades of palm leaves stir listlessly in the thick air, barely moving against the diffuse blue of the sky. To the right stretches the one long, granite countertop of the kitchen and, except for the bedroom and bathroom, the whole place is one neatly outlined light box. Every surface is smooth and white, as polished as a mirror. Cold granite floors and smooth plaster walls whiter than bone and cool as feather-soft snow. It is completely vacant. Empty of anything except light. The whiteness reflected everywhere gives off a silence that is almost physical. The effect is like a reverse prism, refracting the whole spectrum of color and sensation into a single beam of clear white light.

I was visiting Singapore for a month, and though I spent most days outside – watching the older people expertly sniff durians at the open-air markets, waiting out torrential rain at the top of the pagoda at the Chinese garden, strolling by the bright storefronts of the historic district near the futuristic city center – that profoundly empty apartment was where I woke up and came back to, and the moments I spent there seemed to expand forever.

The place had a way of making the world, and time, seem far away. It felt more like a mathematical model than a physical environment, like the kind of space that can only exist in theory. I got that impression from the way the lines met at the corners of the room. Numinous is the word that comes to mind. With a grace beyond imagination. The entire apartment had no trace of a precedent or intention, of any discoverable meaning. Like a vacuum, it completely absorbs any descriptions about it and remains totally unreachable and immaculate, strangely holy. It had a spaciousness that opened onto other dimensions, with unruffled simplicity. I could go on forever about just how empty it was. It was *that* blank.

Even without a soul, the place had a quality that inspired love. I liked to lie on my back in the middle of the floor, to put my cheek against the walls, to feel the glossy counter spreading under my hand. Altogether, the main

room was about one and a half cartwheels long. And it invited cartwheels. The space comfortably contained all modes of free expression, like dancing and crawling, in the most profound sense of those words – including simply existing. In that apartment, I somehow felt completely free, alive in a new way, serene. I even got to looking like a completely different person (almost transparent, shot through with happiness) yet it was like I'd never existed in any other way.

Just the other day, as I was rummaging through my old desk for an envelope to mail a letter in (a real letter!), I came across some notes I'd taken for my anthropology class on materiality. On the back of a recycled library catalog card for a book on "English garden ornament," I read the following quotation:

"Not only are humans as material as the material they mold, humans themselves are molded, through their sensuousness, by the matter with which they are surrounded."

I had been thinking about that apartment in Singapore for the last couple days, so that line gave me a tingly sensation. I felt the cold of a stone floor against my skin. I felt white silence enveloping me like a dream. I felt pristine emptiness seeping into the edges of my heart.

About the Contributors

ALEX BLAIR ALLEN is a junior biology major who loves the little things in life such as her 4' 11" mother and two little sisters. She is extremely grateful for all the support and encouragement given to her by her friends, family, father, and housemates. (47)

KURT BERNING is a '12 UP alumnus from Mt. Angel, Oregon. He's currently the Hall Director of Villa Maria and was a '13 US/UK Fulbright Scholar. (29)

KAREN M. BROWN, born in the West atop a hill of roses overlooking the river, is a shallow-breathing, walking, talking contradiction that only writes when she cannot speak and is believed to only eat Hi-Chews. Her sole mission is to mercilessly hunt down every last glowing Meep and politely ask them to hinder their sprinkling of colourful lint all over the place. (43)

COITO has been smelling like developer and fix a lot lately, so it makes her feel very warm to know that her photos are being published. Special thanks to magnolia trees in bloom, fog, gradations of the color blue, the sounds of her friends' voices, and the word "crestfallen" for helping her see with feeling (and the most special thanks to Alice Walker for the phrase "seeing with feeling"). (cover, 9, 31)

SHANNON DANFORTH is a senior civil engineering student and was way more excited about getting her short story accepted into this magazine than her recent scholarly paper publication. She enjoys drinking craft beer and trying to hit the low notes in Fiona Apple songs. (7)

KERRIE DORAN believes that there is nothing more beautiful than Ellen Page on a skateboard except, maybe, wine & poetry nights, and anything else that involves creating intimate space with people she loves. It also seems relevant to note that someone recently referred to her as an "edgy Dill Pickles," so that's pretty rad. (34, 40, 54)

KATE FENNIMORE is a freshman at the University of Portland who, like most aspiring writers, spends a lot of time with her cat and a cup of tea. (10)

EMILY FITZGERALD has undertaken the challenging task of being a human being and though she sometimes fails, she thinks she's doing a pretty good job overall. Emily's hobbies include taking photos, playing the ukulele, traveling, and becoming a stereotypical Portland hipster. Her life goal is to be a superhero. Let's just say she's working on it. (4)

KRISTINE FOO is an overindulgent child that spent far too much time on her short poem while confronting her long-standing affliction of procrastination. She was recently arrested for soliciting a psychic for life advice. (16)

KATE GARCIA is a junior English and political science double major. Her current obsessions include Lucia Berlin and eating entire tubes of Pringles in one sitting. This semester she is finding inspiration in Galway, Ireland. (1)

STEPHEN KELLAR claims, after he finishes his fourth beer, that perhaps his existence indeed precedes his essence, but perhaps he just needs another pale ale. (38)

EMILY KLINE waits all week for Sunday morning breakfast tacos, which inspire her to break social norms, like having tacos for meals other than lunch and dinner. She is probably the only student at the University of Portland who wants to move to Wyoming when she grows up. (36, 39)

VICTORIA O'NEILL is a senior mathematics major who loves old books, garden gnomes, photography, fancy chocolate, Blue Grass, Vonnegut, and birds. Despite being perpetually preoccupied with math problems, collecting (but never wearing) funny hats, watching the sunrise, and taking pictures of squirrels, she sometimes writes poetry. Her future ambitions include becoming a professional kazooist, hiking the Appalachian Trail, and adopting a dog. (3, 26, 49)

JACKIE OTT is a junior English major who moved to Portland because she really likes the trees. (22)

GABRIELA RIEGOS has a love/hate relationship with both photography and poetry, as in she loves that she hates it. (37, 50, 56)

PEMA ROJAS-ECHENIQUE got her nickname from some lighthearted friends in the country of Bhutan, where it's a common name among both women and

men. It means flower. (57)

ANGIE SILVESTRE is a part-time time traveler stuck in the 2010s, seeks comfort by knitting matching sweaters for her and her dog, and leaves photographs in wine bottles for her future self. She is currently looking for her lost time traveler buddy: Jocelle Tade. (25)

JOEL SIMARD is a senior studying computer science. (14, 46)

CARLEY ST. GEORGE is a sophomore nursing major with a fine arts minor from Seattle, Washington who is passionate about creating various media arts. *Time* is a graphite drawing that was inspired by the effects of time on the homeless population. (19)

JOCELLE TADE is a time traveler and aspiring engineer. In her spare time, she likes to drink tea and take photos of the expansive places she finds on this planet and elsewhere. Unfortunately, she lost her time traveling friend, Angie, in a time vortex. (42)

TESS TREMAYNE is Drake's number one fan, smuggles In-N-Out sauce into Portland, and is just here to party. When she is not out exploring Portland with her friends, she can be found sleeping or potentially breaking a law. (15)

OLIVIA VAN WEY is a senior English major learning to embrace the power of the image. You can catch her roaming the PNW with camera and coffee in hand. (28)

HANNAH VOGEL is an English major and a gin enthusiast. (32, 45)

LEAH WALTERS has been writing since she could grasp a pen and write legibly (even before then but it's just not been translated). She also enjoys reading, theatre and film, and will hopefully one day end up in a creative field, sometime, somewhere, somehow! (51)

CATHERINE WARNER very much relates to the infinite number of monkeys expected to type out *Hamlet*, often asking herself: Why am I here? What the f*** am I writing? And where's my banana? (17)

SARAH BROUSSARD WEAVER is tired. Send coffee and authentic breakfast tacos if you want that essay on time. (5, 20)

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José Velazco, for his tech-savvy and problem-solving in the presentation of the magazine.

Our editors – squad. After months of reading this mag, we thought we'd take it easy on you with some emojis: 🧑🏻‍🎓 🏠 🖥️ 🐘 🦴 🧠 📝 📖 🎉 🎁 ❤️ Thanks baes.

Our contributors, for using their craft, care, and creativity to share intimate parts of themselves and create space for us.

Submission Policy

Writers Magazine accepts submissions of original creative work by current students of the University of Portland. These works include but are not limited to short prose, poetry, short plays, black and white photography, visual arts, and cartoons.

All submissions are evaluated by the editorial board. Submissions are kept anonymous throughout the evaluation process.



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